

SOCIAL EXCLUSION. CULTURAL ROOTS AND DIVERSITIES OF A POPULAR CONCEPT

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(Not Edited for English)**

1. From poverty to social exclusion: an incomplete conceptual shift

Both at the research level and at the policy making level in recent years in Europe there has been a simultaneous linguistic and conceptual move from poverty to social exclusion. The EU has played a crucial role in this shift: first because it has created a public international space in which the latter concept has been proposed and debated; second, because it has introduced it so to say institutionally, in its policy discourse as well as in its research policy, almost imposing it on quite diverse cultural and linguistic traditions.¹ As Paugam (1996, p. 7)) wrote a few years ago, social exclusion is the paradigm on the basis of which our society becomes aware of its own dysfunction and looks, possibly through confusion and urgency, for solutions. Further, this paradigm has taken over at least two other competing ones in describing these dysfunction: that of the underclass, which is prevalent in the US, and that of marginalidad, which is prevalent in Latin America (Fassin 1996).²

This conceptual shift implies a change in perspective: from a static to a dynamic approach, from a one-dimensional to a multidimensional perspective, and also from a distributional to a relational focus (see e.g. Room 1995, Paugam 1996, Atkinson 1998). To some degree, the emergence of the concept of social exclusion has strengthened those concepts of, and approaches to, poverty which stress that it involves not only the lack of fundamental resources, but the inability to fully participate in one's own society (e.g. Townsend 1979). In this perspective, it is strictly linked to the concept of social rights as relational rights, based on some kind of reciprocity, of mutual obligations (see e.g. Room 1995). Social exclusion emphasizes participation, involvement and the customary way of life as against average income or basic needs/baskets of goods, and a concept of well-being as primarily financial. It shares with social Catholicism the view of individuals as being socially embedded (Daly 1999). Its analytic core is constituted by the structure of social relationships and social ties (Spicker 1997: 135). Its inherently comparative nature is apparent in that it problematizes people's situations/conditions *vis-a-vis* the rest of society (Rustin and Rix 1997: 12). Focusing on relations makes it better able than poverty to reveal the mechanisms causing marginalization and the processes associated with it, while at the same time acknowledging the excluded's agency.

In these and other respects, social exclusion emerges as more dynamic, actor-oriented, multi-faceted and methodologically plural than poverty. The sources of social exclusion may therefore be found at the macro level in the consequences of mass unemployment, mass migration or de-industrialization. Or they may be traced at the micro level in the particular experience of (sometimes self-) exclusion of individuals and groups which lack feelings of membership in and loyalty to their community: not only because of the scarcity of material resources or deprivation of social and legal rights, but rather because the contexts people live in and/or their personal biographies have not given them any motivation or chance to belong (Castel 1995). From this point of view, social exclusion could be understood as 'post-modern'. This is not because post-modern subjects have more sophisticated needs than modern ones (as Abrahamson 1997 seems

to suggest), but because in contemporary societies it is more difficult to find the reasons for social integration. The explosion of ‘differences’, formerly hidden or repressed in the pseudo-universalistic ideal of a Euro-core worker-centred citizenship, has not yet been met by theories and practices capable of integrating them. In addition, economic growth without employment, technological change and alterations in family patterns and behaviors systematically render a part of the population redundant, useless, even when socially assisted.

Notwithstanding a wide popularity of the concept, agreement on what social exclusion is about is far from being univocally achieved. On the contrary, the more its use is generalized the notion of social exclusion becomes somewhat vague if not equivocal as a scientific category (see also Frétiugué 1999). It may be used to characterize situations or populations so different that it is sometime difficult to understand what they have in common. Yet, it may not (no longer, at least) be easily dismissed: not only because it has become the framework for public intervention at the national and supra-national (particularly EU) level; also because it is a transversal notion in much ongoing research on the different phenomena and processes which affect the fabric of contemporary societies: the emergence of new risks in the labor market, the weakening of traditional communities and of social ties, the emargination of whole social groups and so forth (see also Paugam 1996, p. 17). Through this, often comparative, research effort, a better understanding of what is covered under the term social exclusion is being developed and both the potentialities and the internal ambiguities of the concept unraveled. Some of these contributions will be discussed in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5.

According to Levitas (1998: 27) social exclusion operates as a shifter between discourses, moving with seeming ease among views of the world which are in fact very different. The EU discourse itself on social exclusion demonstrates this and other ‘political’ advantages of social exclusion discourses. On the one hand it stresses the social rights dimension, which was the perspective which informed the work of the European Observatory on Social Exclusion (Room et al. 1992). This emphasis was repeated in a recent Commission’s document (2000), which declared: “The extent of social exclusion calls on the responsibility of society to ensure equal opportunities for all. This includes equal access to the labour market, to education, to health care, to the judicial system, to rights and to decision-making and participation”. On the other hand, these social rights seem to be interpreted in a very traditional way and both exclusion and inclusion seem to refer almost exclusively to labor market participation. That same document, in fact, argues: “Employment is the key route to integration and social inclusion; unemployment is the major factor of exclusion, particularly long-term unemployment and the increasing concentration of unemployment in households with no one in work.” Also the most recent documents, coming from the Lisbon and Nice summits, somewhat oscillate between the (even too) broad approach and the restricted solution. Thus on the one hand social exclusion covers an increasing number of spheres and experiences; on the other hand employment (or lack of it) continues to be pointed to as, if not the only form of social integration, certainly the main route

into it - even with a risk of under-evaluation of the exclusionary and de-rooting effects of labor market precariousness and flexibilization.

The concept and use of social exclusion seem as a matter of fact to have at least two different genealogies and “families” of linked terms and phenomena, which keep surfacing in a quite unsolved alliance in social exclusion discourses. Poverty and material deprivation on the one hand, reviewed in the light of social rights thinking; social disintegration, marginality, un-belonging, up-rootedness and so forth on the other hand. Thus, on the one hand it points to the social conditions by which individuals and groups are included in or excluded from relevant resources and particularly social rights; on the other hand it points to processes by which individuals and social groups belong to, or are detached from, relevant and meaningful social networks and share in the values and identifications within a given community. Although both levels of analysis are important for understanding what is involved in social exclusion, they are by no means always either addressed jointly in social exclusion discourses. On the contrary, either the focus is on resources and social rights or on affiliation/dis-affiliation dimensions (even further reduced to matters of psychological well/ill being).³

Yet, concern about moral and social disintegration, about the process by which individuals and groups become detached from their community and from its moral order, which is often associated to social exclusion (e.g. Castels 1995), does not necessarily imply a concept of individual social rights. The recent debates over, and demands for, ethnic, community, or group rights, for instance, point to a radically different path towards social integration. And actually barring some individuals (e.g. women, the young) from obtaining individual rights may be, and often is, advocated as a means for preserving social (family, community, ethnic) integrity (on this, see e.g. Sahgal and Yuval Davis 1992, Yuval Davis 1996, Okin 1989). On the other hand, access to social rights per se does not grant actual membership in a community, embeddedness in a meaningful web of belongings. Thus, for instance, in the most developed welfare states the homeless may be entitled in principle to housing and support, but many of them may lack both the knowledge and the capacity to benefit from this right because of their deep isolation and other biographical traits. Sen (1985a, 1985b) addresses this issue under the concept of capability, understood as pre-requisite for social participation and for access to social rights themselves. Sen’s approach, although certainly nearer to the social exclusion than to the poverty approach, challenges both: neither the offering of resources nor the granting of rights is sufficient to avoid social exclusion if the specific capabilities and functionings of the individuals are not addressed. This perspective is particularly crucial with regard to children. Further, while most definitions and usage of social exclusion maintain a link with material deprivation, i.e. they imply that social exclusion occurs in the presence of, or as a consequence of material deprivation of some kind (e.g. Castels 1991, Paugam 1997), both if one understands social exclusion either as an expression of social disintegration and of individual detachment from the social order or as a lack of minimum rights, that link is by no means necessary: one might not be financially poor, but still be socially excluded. The case of many immigrants who in Europe are integrated in

the labor market but lack many basic citizenship rights and are perceived as extraneous to the community they live in is a case in point.

Furthermore, recent research has begun to question the empirical and theoretical validity of the relation between the two concepts – poverty and social exclusion. Empirical data suggests that there is no self-evident link not only between unemployment and poverty but also between poverty and social isolation and/or psychological ill-being. Not only do these vary among social groups and on the basis of duration of the experience (of economic distress or unemployment see e.g. Leisering and Leibfried 1999) but they also differ across countries according, *inter alia*, to the social security system, family arrangements and culture (Saraceno 1997, Gallie 1999; Gallie and Paugam 2000).

As a matter of fact, the locus from where and the actors with regard to whom the social exclusion discourse is developed and then extended to other contexts should not be overlooked. Both the national and cultural context and the actors focused upon highlight specific patterns of social exclusion and of ways of understanding it. Thus social isolation, and/or up-rootedness appear more a feature of men's experience of social exclusion than of women: the former are readily seen as socially excluded when long term unemployed because this is perceived as their main route both to normality and to social integration; and when they loose the social ties they form through work they are perceived as lacking social ties altogether. As a consequence, the fact that women may be excluded from employment and other forms of social participation not because they are up-rooted or with weak, or loose, social networks, but because they are too strictly embedded – included – in family networks and obligations, tends to be overlooked. Further, while welfare dependency is increasingly seen as a cause of social exclusion (or negative inclusion), dependency on one's own family resources is not, particularly in the case of women and the young; although, as also Goodin (1988, p. 351) observed, depending from one's own family subjects an individual to the arbitrary will of others.

Actually, the dual, and ambivalent, role of family solidarity in protecting and restricting women (and the young, at least in Southern European countries), the dense networks in which many of the poor and long term unemployed conduct their lives in Mediterranean countries – which defy conventional visions of the socially excluded as isolated (see also Gallie 1999) – is a good example of the need of an integrated view of the two levels in the interplay of which social exclusion occurs: that of (individual) social rights and that of community membership. Community membership without individual rights may be as, albeit differently, exclusionary as access to social rights without access to community membership. And the severest exclusion occurs when access to both is denied or impossible. At the same time it points to the need of a conceptualization of social exclusion – as well as of its indicators - more attentive to context specificity: both in terms of welfare regimes⁴ and in terms of national, local, group specific, cultural understandings concerning patterns of inclusion, participation to a meaningful life and so for (see also Svetlik 2000, Berman and Philips 2000).

2. Intellectual roots of the social exclusion discourse⁵

Silver (1994) identifies three different theoretical and political perspectives within which the concept (or metaphor) of social exclusion is developed. She calls these paradigms, in Thomas Kuhn's understanding of the term,⁶ and tracks differences in what they regard as the causes of exclusion and the political philosophy in which they are grounded. The three paradigms are the solidarity, specialization and monopoly paradigms. They dovetail in some respects with national discourses for they may respectively be traced to French republican notions of solidarity, Anglo-American liberal individualism and the European social democratic notion of conflict based on hierarchical power relations.⁷ While Silver's reasoning and distinctions are not always clear, her thesis is insightful not least in pointing out how different visions of the polity embody different conceptions of social exclusion.

Within the contemporary French discourse on social exclusion, the emphasis is on 'social' and collective ties.⁸ With roots in the Durkheimian notion of social bond and the relevance of normative integration, the risk of socially anomic behaviours and the need to offset the mechanisms which produce these are the core concerns of the French discourse on social exclusion. In other words, social cohesion in the sense of dominant consensual values, mores and social bonds is to the fore. The socially excluded, defined as those who for some reason or another are outside the polity, suffer from some kind of inability in social relations and are rootless. According to Touraine (1991, 1992), social exclusion is typical of post modern societies within which the issue is no longer hierarchy and inequality, but horizontal segregation and refusal to include. The hierarchy of traditional class structure was a way of including, even if through conflict. The refusal to acknowledge each others or particular social groups is not merely and mainly a form of inequality; rather a form of non membership, non existence.

Thus the focus of policy discourse is no longer on inequality, and the means to correct it, but on integration, insertion/re-insertion. The typical 'socially excluded' in the French discourse (and the ideal type of RMI recipient) is a family-less single person, often a man, experiencing various kinds of personal and social handicap, who needs to be 'socially re-inserted' or 're-integrated'. Reinsertion is to be achieved by various kinds of enabling activities which may be perceived as empowering but also involve attempts at control and place the subjects under surveillance (see e.g. Belorgey 1996; Barbier 1998).⁹ At the same time, there is a duty of society, the state in general and social workers in particular to actively seek out the socially excluded, to try to reweave their social bonds and to offer them chances for 'integration'. In principle the entire society is called upon to re-integrate itself by offering individuals the possibility of being inserted in solidarity networks and meaningful social contacts (e.g. Rosanvallon 1995). While in the Sixties and Seventies this concept still pointed to the existence of social groups and individuals who were characterized by a *de facto* exclusion, now the focus is on the processes which lead to this situation, which in turn is perceived as threatening an increasing number of individuals and groups. In this perspective, the widely used if contested term 'contract' as in 'insertion contract', which is the keyword

in the French discourse, is nearer to the concept of social contract as the founding relationship of the society than it is to that of the individual business contract. A conception of reciprocity, which stresses the community's (and social workers') responsibility as much as the recipient's agency, is central. Although in practice this conception of reciprocity too results in an asymmetrical relationship, it seeks to keep in check the strong asymmetry of the traditional social assistance relationship. Thus social exclusion was not oriented principally to emphasise recipients' obligations, as in the US and the UK, but rather their agency and negotiating power. And it extends beyond either income support or job insertion, encompassing also measures aimed at combating processes of disaffiliation and un-rootedness (Milano 1995; Barbier 1996, 1998).

In the liberal tradition, particularly in its Anglo-American variant, social exclusion is not an endogenous concept. Here 'the culture of poverty' has loomed large. In the 1960s it offered a mirror in which the society could view itself, giving a rich account of the plight and experiences of those living at the margins and connecting material deprivation with self perception, identity and way of living. It also offered a theoretical rationale to blame the poor for their situation. In shifting the focus from the deprivation itself to its symbolic and behavioral consequences, it turned away from the excluding process (and actors) to self-exclusion. Concepts achieving prominence more recently in Britain and the US are the underclass (Dahrendorf 1984; Wilson 1987; Smith 1992) and 'two tier society'.¹⁰ In the liberal tradition the focus is as much on institutional barriers and forms of discrimination as on social differentiation as the outcome of individual agency. If society's duty is to remove barriers, that of the individual is to make the best of the options offered. Adopting the metaphor of social exclusion within this framework affords, on the one hand, the opportunity to recapture the richness of the culture of poverty approach. Social exclusion's focus on the multiple dimensions of deprivation, on the relevance of social networks and self perception, together with its focus on actors are some of its noteworthy advantages in this regard. On the other hand social exclusion draws attention to the social as against individual mechanisms producing un-belonging – for instance discrimination in the labor market or in access to social security benefits or housing, or credit, or more generally in access to consumption (Atkinson 1998). From this dual view comes both a shared concern for the mechanisms which produce the phenomenon of the working poor¹¹ – which is a particularly pressing concern in the US and UK – and dependency (a "perverse for of inclusion" according to many of its critics) as produced by welfare state supports themselves, particularly among lone mothers. Although in both countries there is a shared understanding of inclusion as occurring mainly through paid work so that it is necessary 'to make work pay', the British tradition informed by Marshall's theory of citizenship recognizes that social exclusion also involves access to social rights. This locates the British position closer to the social democratic one - or 'monopoly paradigm' in Silver's terminology.

In this third paradigm, power relations, group monopolies and the domination and exclusion of outsiders are to the fore. Powerful class and status groups, which have

distinct social and cultural identities as well as institutions, use social closure to restrict the access of outsiders to valued resources (such as good jobs, good benefits, education, urban locations, valued patterns of consumption) (Silver 1994: 562). While the liberal paradigm points to the risks of welfare dependency for the poor, the monopoly paradigm points to the material and cultural/symbolic privileges of the insiders as the cause of the exclusion of the outsiders. Inequality and economic exploitation lead to exclusion in this view. Inclusion occurs mainly through the extension to outsiders of equal membership in society through access to citizenship rights, which in turn must be checked for their exclusionary potential. This discourse may apply to any kind of social closure, including that between nation states as well as that between the EU and other countries. The discourse on 'fortress Europe' has its roots here, connoting the external and internal boundaries and barriers which keep some groups from becoming insiders, from fully participating in the status of citizens. While in the liberal paradigm the social rights which are under scrutiny for their tendency to create exclusion through dependency are social assistance rights (e.g. income support for the poor), in the monopoly paradigm standard social rights – unemployment protection, pension benefits and forth – are the main source of concern. These social rights of the insiders have to be scrutinized to ascertain if their generosity and strenuous protection create barriers to entry for other groups. There are echoes here of the critique leveled against the continental European welfare states - that they protect strongly the adult male, core workers (i.e. the insiders) to the detriment of the outsiders. In this perspective social inclusion implies not only extending access to but also transforming the social security and social protection system to render it more inclusive and more attuned to the social and individual risks emerging over the life course as well as to varieties of life circumstances (see e.g. Leisering and Leibfried 1999).¹²

The EU discourse on social exclusion has oscillated between these different "paradigms" over time, without clearly choosing among them. Thus, on the one hand it stresses the social rights dimension, which was the perspective which informed the work of the European Observatory on Social Exclusion (Room et al. 1992); on the other hand it privileges employment as the main route to inclusion. This dual emphasis is confirmed in the recent documents by the Commission on the European social agenda, and it has been incorporated to a degree in the document approved at the Nice summit in 2000. Thus a document of March 2000 declared: "The extent of social exclusion calls on the responsibility of society to ensure equal opportunities for all. This includes equal access to the labor market, to education, to health care, to the judicial system, to rights and to decision-making and participation". And the European Social agenda stresses that "Employment is the best protection against social exclusion... Social policy has a crucial role parallel to that of employment policy; yet the relevance of other factors must be acknowledged, such as housing, education, health, information, communication, mobility, security and justice, culture and consumption."

What this discussion shows is that social exclusion is a politically flexible concept. Indeed, there are good grounds for claiming that social exclusion has been more

developed as discourse than as concept. That is, the idea has been most used and articulated in the service of the language of politics. Hence it constitutes a relatively loose set of ideas to represent the world in particular settings rather than a concept with theoretical substance and coherence which transcends national and political contexts.

3. Unemployment and social exclusion. Contested links

The wide popularity of social exclusion discourse has been prompted by the emergence of mass (male) unemployment. It is this deviance from the “normal” male pattern, around which so much of the social organization of industrialized countries developed, that is perceived as a social risk, certainly further heightened by other changes in what Crouch (1999) has defined the post-war social contract. But also family arrangements are changing, particularly with the fragilization of marriage and the rise of lone parent (mostly mother) families; and the growing flux of immigrants from outside the borders of what used to be called the Western world. Both these phenomena question long standing arrangements in the labor markets and in the systems of social protection, as well as in the organization of everyday life.

As a matter of fact, concern over mass unemployment seems to obfuscate all other reasons for social and economic vulnerability: as if it were the weakening of the male breadwinner – in the form of adult male unemployment – to render poverty unacceptable and at the same time a risk for social cohesion, notwithstanding the fact that the individuals most at risk of poverty and possibly social exclusion are often not the adult male unemployed, but children, housewives, the old: i.e. individuals who, because of their age or position in the gender division of labor do not even appear in the rolls of the unemployed. Recent studies both on poverty and on social assistance recipients, in fact, indicate that there exist a much broader range of social risks, many of whom show a remarkable continuity over historical time, although their specific causes and circumstances are changed: now as in the past the end of a marriage exposes women and children to the risk of poverty and to the need for social support; although now separation is the cause much more than death of a spouse; also old age may still represent a risk, particularly for the older cohorts (and for women within them) and if associated with frailty. In addition, not only growing unemployment, but immigration and adherence to non standard life styles increasingly represent new causes of poverty (Glotz 1994, Beck and Seewald 1994, Duncan 1984, Mejer 2000, Leibfried and Leisering 1999, Paugam 1997).

Moreover, social anxiety over not only the plight, but the threat to social cohesion posed by mass unemployment risks representing the unemployed not only as coinciding with the socially excluded, but as needing some special incentive and backing to counter personal deficits or to contrast negative individual or group tendencies. Many welfare to work and activating policies, as well as in some cases the blurring of boundaries between social security and social assistance, are borne out of this anxiety.

Recent cross country research on the unemployed (e.g. Gallie 1999, Gallie and Paugam ed. 2000) actually do not offer a straightforward support to the hypothesis of a strong and univocal link between unemployment and social exclusion, in the sense of social isolation. The link is clearer with economic poverty, of course, but even in this case it varies greatly among countries, on the basis of the family arrangements of the unemployed and on the basis of the system of social protection (see also Haataja 1999). According to the study coordinated by Gallie and Paugam, the proportion of the unemployed in poverty (taking the 50% mean equivalised income line) varied from 8% in Denmark to 49% in the UK. These variations reflect first of all the effectiveness of the system of social transfers (unemployment indemnity) in the different countries. They reflect however also the country specific age and social profile of the unemployed and the patterns of family arrangements. Thus, in the Mediterranean countries unemployment is heavily concentrated among the young; but in these same countries the young, differently from their contemporaries in other countries, live to a greater degree with their parents, thus being partially shielded from poverty (see also OECD 1998). Over two thirds of young unemployed adults aged 20-29 live with their parents in Italy, Spain and Portugal. The corresponding figures are 42% in the UK, 29% in Germany, 14% in Denmark and Sweden. Of course, the level of financial support that the family may provide depends upon its own level of resources and the unemployed tend to be concentrated among the poorer families. Thus, the responsibility to support one's own unemployed due to the lack of adequate social protection may cause financial stress and hardship for the whole family (see also Saraceno 2000). This situation is compounded by the lack, or scarcity of support to families with dependent children in all Southern European countries, which exposes them to vulnerability to poverty to a greater degree than in most Francophone and Scandinavian countries.

Also with regard to social isolation and psychological stress, the link is far from evident. Certainly recent studies (Gallie and Paugam 2000, Gallie 1999, Mejer 2000) show, those who are out of the labor market and unemployed not only have a higher risk of being poor but also a higher risk to have low education and professional skills, not to own their apartment, not to own a car, not to be able to spend a week's holiday away. They appear generally more vulnerable to economic deprivation and with lower human and social capital. Yet, the hypothesis that unemployment causes social isolation is far from being confirmed by research. Both a cross country EU wide study on the unemployed (Gallie 1999) and a both cross country and longitudinal (on the basis of Europanel data) study on a number of European countries found that, with the partial exception of France, there is no evidence that unemployment reduces social networks. That is, in each country the social networks of the unemployed do not appear dissimilar from those in unemployment. At the same time, there are substantial cross country differences: the Mediterranean countries - where both the unemployment rate and the likelihood that it implies financial hardship are higher than in other countries – show a higher degree of involvement with kin, friends and neighbors among the unemployed than the Danes or the Dutch; the German unemployed experience a comparatively higher level of social isolation from their friends' networks.. Overall, the risk of social

isolation appears to be heavily conditioned by the broader country-specific patterns of sociability, not by the experience of unemployment per se.¹³ The most clear within country difference between the unemployed and the employed appears to be in participation in associative life, which tends to be reduced among the former in all countries, notwithstanding the existence of country-specific patterns. This might suggest that unemployment, particularly if long term, reduces the range of social activities in which individuals are involved, particularly those activities which help people to preserve their integration into socially acknowledged roles and citizenship norms. In the case the long term unemployed have parental responsibilities, this may affect both their capabilities as parents and the range of meaningful networks and situations they might be able to offer to their children.

Overall, the link between unemployment on the one hand and a reduction in the range and variety of social networks and an increase in psychological stress on the other hand becomes more significant in the case of a longer (over two years) duration in employment. These are the instances in which studies find both indications of a narrowing of the variety (not necessarily of the extent and intensity) of social networks and of psychological stress. Time appears therefore a crucial factor in social exclusion processes, although, again, its impact might be different depending on social protection measures on the one hand, on patterns of informal and particularly family support on the other hand. As the study coordinated by Gallie and Paugam concludes, cross country variations in the link between unemployment and the risk of social exclusion may be accounted for to a great degree by variations in the character of the welfare state; but of central importance are also family cultures and arrangements and patterns of sociability in particular societies. In the Northern countries the system of social protection shields the unemployed not only from financial hardship but also from loss of dignity and of human and social capital, allowing them to remain integrated in their social networks. In the Southern countries, where both unemployment and poverty are much more widespread than in the Northern ones, and social protection is meager, the unemployed appear to be protected from social exclusion through the financial and social support they receive from parents and friends. This, however, puts stress on these very social supports, while leaving without resources those who cannot count on them. The risk of social exclusion (not of economic poverty), in terms of social isolation, appears greatest in countries – such as the UK, France and Germany – in which the system of social protection provides relatively low, or uneven and often stigmatizing financial assistance, and where the informal social support is relatively weak.

We may add to this that an exclusive focus on employment as the main route to social inclusion does not allow for much understanding of the specificity of the experience of children in social exclusion processes, except as a future outcome of present deprivation. Both their exclusion and their inclusion seems to be a direct outcome of the exclusion or inclusion of their parents from the labor market. It should be noted that this approach is increasingly shared by national policies. This is particularly evident in countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands where formerly lone mothers receiving

social assistance were exempted from the requirement to be available to take a job, in the name of their main role as caring parent are now increasingly encouraged to take a paid job, that is to take up breadwinning as their main parental role. (see e.g. Van Dreuth, Knijn and Lewis 1999). Thus, while a working mother may still be perceived as a possible liability in the upbringing of her children and a likely cause of their feeling of isolation and lack of connectedness, when she is the only parent present, an unemployed mother is also increasingly perceived as a liability for her children if she receives social assistance: dependence from a husband is a sign of social integration, dependence from social assistance a sign of social exclusion. It should be noticed, however, that this does not always coincide with self perceptions as it depends heavily on subjective as well as local and national family and motherhood cultures. Thus, Dutch lone mothers seem less willing to accept this shift in focus, since they share an idea of caring motherhood as a highly integrative activity. And French lone mothers who, until their youngest child is three, receive an ad hoc measure, do not perceive themselves as being assisted because they are out work, but because they are doing their duty as mothers (Aillet 1997/1998).

Finally, the idea that any job is better than no job (and particularly better than relying on social assistance) from a social inclusion point of view is at least over –simplistic. Atkinson (1998b) and Paugam's (1997), for instance, argue that actually some jobs might be more socially excluding than social assistance itself, in terms of social and professional disqualification. Forcing a person to take any job may have serious effects upon his/her skills, therefore also on his/her ability to stay in the labour market. This is particularly true when the unskilled, bad job, is also not a social security protected one. From this point of view, Paugam, distinguishes between “disqualified integration” in the case of people holding an unskilled, but secure and covered by social security, job and “compromised integration” in the case of unskilled jobs in the informal economy with no social security coverage. Further, the reason why social assistance may result in social exclusion lies not so much in its hypothetical corrupting effect on beneficiaries¹⁴ as in the degree to which specific patterns of providing it stigmatise them, therefore weakening their social status and even their perception of themselves. Levels of generosity, degree of universality, patterns of control and of enforcing specific behaviours have proven crucial in this respect (Saraceno, forthcoming).

4. Time in the analysis of social exclusion

The relevance of a time perspective in the analysis of poverty has been acknowledged at least since Rowntree's (1901) pioneering studies a century ago. Rowntree, in fact, was well aware that the poor were not always poor over their whole life. Rather, the chances of being poor for the London's manual workers and their families were linked to specific life course stages and circumstances: typically, being a child and having children in need of support, being old (in pre-welfare state times). From a gender sensitive perspective, we might add being fatherless, or being a widow. Thus, any head count in a given year said, and says, little about the life experience of the poor: for how long they have been thus, and how long they will likely remain in poverty. At

the same time, the head count tends to under-represent the number of those who experience poverty over the life course. Both these aspects of poverty – its being a dynamic, rather than a static phenomenon, and its being a life occurrence which may affect a larger quota than that estimated by static, headcount, poverty rates, may be studied only from a life course approach, on the basis of longitudinal data. This insight has been long, if unsystematically, present in post war poverty research since at least the sixties (see e.g. Glatzer and Krupp 1975, Commissione di Indagine sulla Povertà 1985). Yet, until recently longitudinal data were lacking and Europe has lagged behind the United States in providing them. Thus de facto the discourse on poverty remained based on headcount data, however sophisticated and differentiated might be the techniques for “counting the poor”. Moreover, as Leisering and Leibfried point out in the introduction of their volume (1999, pp.19-20) until recently even those studies of poverty which used a dynamic perspective shared the assumption that time was univocally an aggravating factor in the dynamics of poverty and social exclusion: poverty was seen as a cumulative process, where experiences, including that of receiving social assistance, and trajectories negatively reinforce each other. In this approach concern for the multidimensionality of poverty combine with the possible labelling effects not only of poverty (and unemployment) but also of social assistance in offering a view of the poor as mere victims of society launched in a hopeless downward path. This same assumption more or less explicitly lies behind contemporary concerns over “welfare state dependency”, supported also by research strategies and choices which have long privileged the study of a specific sub-group of the socially assisted: those defined as being most marginal, be it because of specific biographical handicaps (deviant life styles, physical or mental handicaps, immigration) and/or because of the long time they have been receiving social assistance.

US research had already undermined the idea of poverty as a univocally long term and cumulative experience since the important Panel Study on Income Dynamics (Duncan 1984). From that study it emerged that the quota of the population vulnerable to poverty was much greater and more heterogeneous than that estimated by static measures and that it comprised individuals and families who experienced it once in their life time, individuals and families who experienced it many times for varying periods, and finally individuals and families who experienced it continuously, for lengthy periods, possibly throughout their entire life. The hypothesis of negative cumulative and mutually strengthening processes certainly held for the last group and was a possible risk for the second; but it did not hold at all for the first. The second group was possibly the most interesting from this point of view, since it did not only exhibit all the expected causes of vulnerability – gender, inadequate education and professional skills, family composition and arrangements, lack of adequate means of social protection. It exhibited also the variety of pathways by which one might enter, but also exit poverty: illness, marriage breakdown, unemployment, birth of an additional child, on the one hand, employment, marriage, a child exiting the household, or finding a job, and so forth on the other hand. This stress on the dynamics of poverty and on its variations was further developed both empirically and theoretically by Bane and Ellwood's studies (1984, 1994). An important contribution, although not always fully

acknowledged and integrated in mainstream life course research on poverty, came also from US and European studies on women's gender specific vulnerability to poverty: studies on the consequences of marital instability and divorce (e.g. Weitzman 1985) and particularly on women's vulnerability to poverty in old age, because of the combined effects of family careers and social security regulations (e.g. Joshi 1989, 1992, Allmendinger, Brückner H. and Brückner E. 1991). Particularly, going to Europe life course research in general and life course studies on poverty in particular added an attention for the structuring role of social policies. Overall, however, life course research on poverty is still lacking in many European countries. The dynamic approach to poverty is particularly developed, and may rely on adequate longitudinal data at the national level, in Germany, the UK, the Nordic countries. Comparative studies are thus limited.

Leisering and Leibfried, on the basis of their study of social assistance careers in two German cities over a six year period, indicate that from the point of view of duration there are at least three distinct groups of social assistance recipients which point to distinct paths into and conditions of poverty as well as to different vulnerability to social exclusion (see also Paugam 1997 for similar hypotheses on France)¹⁵: *the temporarily poor*, who have short, and sometime single spells of poverty. In Germany in the nineties they comprised mostly the unemployed and the immigrants. *The repeatedly poor*, who, although are often above the poverty line, fall frequently below it in times of economic insecurity and/or changing family circumstances or life projects. Here many low income workers may be found. *The permanent or long term poor*, who comprise people who for some reason (age, gender, health, lack of skills, a combination of these) do not succeed, or have no possibility of succeeding, in becoming financially self-sufficient. The various social groups vulnerable to poverty are differently distributed within these temporal patterns, therefore also differently exposed to the risk of social exclusion. Leisering and Leibfried (pp. 245-9) identify four main groups plus two special, more cross cutting ones. According to these two authors the range of these types “exposes the diversity of conditions between exclusion in a strict sense and full inclusion” (p. 246). Also, it helps to distinguish between poverty as material deprivation and social exclusion as a severe constrain on social participation: not in order to write off the former as not severe enough; rather, and to the contrary, to give serious attention to both. The proposed types are: a) the relatively secure members of the middle class (often labelled as the “new poor”) who are now more exposed to social insecurity than in the past, either because of family reasons (marriage breakdown) or because of labour market vagaries. They see benefit claiming as both temporary and instrumental to actively combat their situation. b) People with permanently low income, living just above the poverty line, but always at risk of falling below it, since they lack a cushion of protective resources either because of their structural position or stage in life. Although they are integrated in society their integration is always under threat and they constantly run the risk of falling into the next category. c) The long term deprived, who suffer significant material or non material deprivations, but are not necessarily and comprehensively excluded from participating in social life: not through work, but through consumption and embeddedness in family, kin and

community networks (see also Paugam 1997). d) The long term socially excluded, who are not only deprived of material resources but are also excluded from social participation due to active social discrimination or to the inability to cope, which render difficult for them to be active members of meaningful social networks. The homeless, the mentally ill, those whose biographies have been for some reason seriously disrupted belong to this group which has long dominated public imagination concerning the socially excluded or the Fourth World. To these four types they add other two: e) people with an unsettled mode of existence, whose life style on the edge of society is in part an expression of deliberate choice and who might be also be seen as hazardous “commuters” between normal life course and social decline. They often use social assistance deliberately in a “strategic”, even if often intermittent, way: not, as in the case of the first group, in order to bridge an occasional spell of misfortune or to re-orient their lives (as in the case of a marriage breakdown), but as a systematic way of supporting their chosen life style. If the group of the long term socially excluded is the main reference of many poverty discourse, that of the “unsettled” is the more or less explicit reference group when pointing to the combined risk of social assistance dependency and social assistance scrounging. f) The new immigrants, who are by definition in a transitional situation. Depending on the circumstances they may end up in one of the other types, or exit altogether poverty and social assistance.

Thus, the longitudinal perspective offers ground both for an understanding of social exclusion as a succession, and cumulation, of breaks and disadvantages in an individual’s life, and for more clearly distinguishing between occasional poverty and long term deprivation, as well as between material deprivation and social isolation. This in turn helps to understand the poor and the vulnerable to social as agents in their own right, as bearers of interpretations and meanings concerning their circumstances, which must be taken account of not only in research, but also in policy making.

5. Grappling with “facts”: a revival of social indicators research

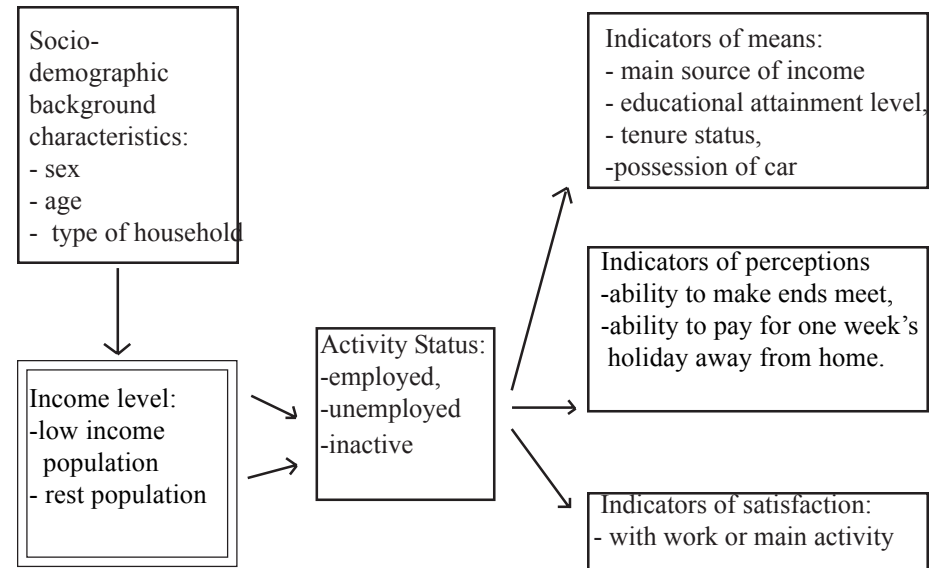
As Berman and Phillips (2000) observe, social indicators are now back in vogue and both national and international (EU, OECD, UN) institutions and social researchers are now involved in the effort of identifying and standardizing measurements of human well being (see also Rothenbacher, 1998). The most ambitious taxonomy was developed by the OECD in the early 1990s and covered “convergence, exclusion, equal opportunity, poverty and cohesion” (Vogel 1994, p. 252).

This development is taking place in the context of two others. First, there is a re-definition of the concept itself of the “level of living” and more so of “well-being” which lied beyond the development of the social indicators movement in the sixties in the first place. The shift from attention for poverty and material deprivation to attention for social exclusion is part of this move. Second, there is a growing interest for comparative, standardized data and indicators. This latter development is contributing in very crucial ways both to conceptualizations and to research. At the same time it

points to, and suffers from, a kind of paradox: in so far one of the reasons for redefining well-being and social inclusion/exclusion is attention for diversity, at the individual, community, local, national level, both aim to find common indicators and to set common standards seems at first sight ill founded and possibly misconceived (see also Svetlik 2000). It might even be interpreted as an attempt at imposing top down some kind of “universal” standard.¹⁶ Yet the ongoing debate on social indicators from the point of view of research offers an interesting terrain for a better understanding of what well being, social inclusion, social exclusion are, or might be, about.

In this report on Social Exclusion in the EU members states for Eurostat Meyer (2000) present a complex framework for analyzing social exclusion, synthesized in fig. 1

Figure 1.
Framework for analysing social exclusion



In the guidelines for the preparation of the National Action Plans for inclusion and in the document supporting the creation of a subgroup on indicators within the Social Protection Committee, it is argued that seven indicators are already available for comparative purposes, while others should be developed: The seven are: distribution of income, poverty rate before and after transfers, persistence of poverty, jobless households, regional cohesion, early school leavers not in further education and training, long term unemployment. Health, housing, access to services and to training and education, conditions of work are the areas in which further work should be developed. The discussion is now open concerning not only the availability and reliability¹⁷, but the efficacy and cross country meaningfulness of some of the seven indicators from the point of view of social exclusion. E.g. in Italy many jobless households might often comprise a not poor widow holding a survivor pension and an adult child still in education. Therefore they are not necessarily poor nor socially excluded.

The issue of meaningfulness arises more readily in the case of comparative indicators. Yet the same problem is present also in national experiences. The very interesting debate opened around the monitoring of the UK strategy to tackle poverty (see CASE Report 2001) for instance, points not only to the issue of the quality, availability, national representativity of the indicators chosen by the UK government, but also to issues concerning the quality of indicators themselves, of what they should measure and point to. Therefore they address the issue of what social exclusion is supposed to be. Thus, for instance, Bradshaw (2001) argues that these indicators are both too narrow, in so far they do not address adequately issues concerning health and subjective well being, and too wide, in so far some of them are not related to poverty (e.g. smoking rates among adults, or cocaine and heroin use among young people). Also Harker (2001) in the same debate, while suggesting a number of areas/indicators that should be included in assessing social exclusion and in monitoring success in reducing it, argues that measures of general well being should not be confused with measures of poverty or social exclusion. Her criticism is particularly addressed to indicators such as the proportion of elderly people living with the fear of crime, or life expectancy to age 65, or the proportion of people being helped to live independently. In other words, in this discussion the concern seems twofold: on the one hand there is a widespread agreement that in order to grasp not only poverty, but social exclusion one needs indicators which go beyond material deprivation; on the other hand concern is expressed about widening too much the range of areas and items included, risking to lose sight of social exclusion itself, which is understood as strictly linked to, even if wider and more multidimensional than, poverty and material deprivation. In the words of Harker (2001, p. 32), “Measures of poverty and social exclusion should be somewhere between income poverty and well being but focused on the ‘bottom end’ – in other words, the measures should reflect concern about where there are unacceptable differences in living standards and opportunities.”

A quite different, if not opposite, approach is taken by those who propose to insert the issue of social exclusion within the wider one of social quality. This has been tentatively

defined as “the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well being and individual potential” (Beck et al., 1997, p. 3). This concept is intended to encompass both subjective and objective interpretations. Social inclusion/exclusion is one of the four elements which identify it, the others being social economic security/insecurity, social cohesion/anomie, empowerment/disempowerment. As a matter of fact, when addressing the issue of indicators for all these four elements, social exclusion/inclusion appears at the same time as only one of them, and as cross-cutting and including them. In the words of Berman and Phillips (2000, p. 333), who attempt at developing a systematic approach for the development of indicators both of social exclusion and social quality, “some of the domains for social exclusion necessarily have to be closely related to those of socio-economic security because social inclusion depends upon, among other things, a minimum level of the collective goods that confer socio-economic security. The definitional difference in these domains and indicators between the two dimensions relates to who is included. Moreover, social inclusion is not merely substantively co-terminous with socio-economic security, it also covers areas relevant to social cohesion” And of course also to empowerment.

Within the “social quality quadrant”,¹⁸ following Delanty’s (1998) distinction between “Demos” and “Ethnos” Berman and Phillips identify two distinct sets of social exclusion indicators: one at the level of the nation-state (which they approximate to Demos) and the other at the Ethnos, community level. Indicators at the level of the nation-state should measure the inaccessibility (through discrimination, ignorance or inability) of rights and services to those who by definition of citizenship should have access to them. Indicators at the community level instead should measure the degree of participation and identification. “These domains are psychosocial in nature in the sense that they relate to the consciousness and significance of the interaction and relationship between a person and his/her identified community. Social exclusion in the community-individual relationship is a result of the weakness of social bonds” (p. 345). Thus individuals might be communally included but nationally excluded (e.g. immigrants living in tight ethnic communities, but also women included in family and kin, but excluded from social participation); or they might be nationally included but with no community membership (e.g. isolated immigrants, or people who have left their rural communities); finally individuals might be both nationally and communally excluded, as in the case of many foreign immigrants having no citizenship right and being cut off from their communities, or the homeless.

We might say that this framework offers a way of integrating the two conceptions of social exclusion which usually de facto compete in analysis: that which links it to a weakening, or absence, of social rights and that which links it to lack, or destruction of patterns of belonging: simplistically, the British and the French tradition. What is perhaps missing notwithstanding the broad perspective is the sometime exclusionary effect of the rules both of national inclusion and of community inclusion. We already said that women might be excluded from social participation and even rights (e.g. a decent pension) because of their “excess” of inclusion in family and kinship. And

many rules concerning entitlement to social and political rights act effectively to exclude groups who cannot fulfil the set requirements: e.g. time rules concerning residence, or definitions of what counts as work, and so forth. This dual risk is becoming increasingly apparent in the case of foreign immigrants who, particularly the young of both genders and women of all ages, may find themselves caught in the middle of two opposite definitions of and requirements for inclusion, in the nation state where they live and in their community.

6. Concluding remarks

Chamberlayne (1997) regards the theoretical and methodological underdevelopment of the concept of social exclusion as an opportunity. For her it stimulates fresh thinking, calls into question assumptions and, in the European context, challenges national traditions in thinking about inequality, poverty and difference. It challenges also traditions in social policy. Yet, this conceptual looseness and shifting meaning which render it may be more a metaphor than a concept, has its risks, both at the level of research and of policy making. The more encompassing a concept the more open to the risk not only of leaving something relevant out, but also of being based on pre-judgements which remain unscrutinized. In his discussion of Doyal and Gough's contribution to the issue of "universal", cross national indicators of wellbeing,¹⁹ Svetlik (2000, p. 81), for instance argues that "they start from a specific theory, which includes certain value judgements made by the authors themselves. The main reference is made to the scientific community and to socially agreed documents." In other words, they start from a shared normative idea of basic values. The recurrent negotiations on what is the precise content of these basic values in the UN international conferences indicates not only the complexity, but the fragility of the consensus around them.

Precisely this acknowledgement, however, may suggest another way of looking at social exclusion discourse at the national and international level: social exclusion is possibly much more a social policy concept than a theoretical and research one. In the words of Paugam we recalled at the beginning, it is a way in which a society assesses its performance and its risks with regard to social cohesion and the individuals' well being. As such, its content is not given once for ever and across the board. Rather it is constructed in specific patterns of community and state, in situated negotiated understandings about rights and obligations, membership and autonomy. The social exclusion discourse as a policy discourse is part of this process of construction and negotiations. From this point of view, then, the existence of a supra-national discourse on social exclusion, in research but also, or possibly more so, in policy devising and making, is a way of elaborating, rather than simply imposing, basic shared values and standards.

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Endnotes

¹ In 1986, at the conclusion of the Second Anti Poverty Program, the European Observatory on Policies to Combat Social Exclusion was instituted. When devising its fourth Anti-Poverty Program (which was never launched due to the opposition of some countries), the Commission explicitly stated that it would be a program against social exclusion, not "merely" against poverty (see Commission of the European Communities 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Robbins 1993). Social exclusion is the concept used also in the framework of Targeted Social Economic Research and then in the Fifth Framework Research Program. The concept is also used by EUROSTAT in its analysis of EURO Panel data, in which it also attempts at developing a complex analytic framework (see Mejer 2000).

² According to Fassin all three are mental maps which interpret differently the basic divisions in society: high/low in the US (and partly the UK), center/periphery in Latin America, in/out in France.

³ In the latter meaning, the shift in focus from poverty to social exclusion may not univocally represent a richer conceptual framework. It may represent also a shift in the public discourse and concern: from serious inequality in granting access to crucial resources to the risks of social integration, from concern for the living conditions and options of individuals and groups to concern for social cohesion, from the need to provide options and resources to the need to keep in check deviant and socially dangerous behaviors, from concern with the adequacy of social protection, to concern for the risks of social protection, from concern for the causes of unemployment to concern for the personal characteristics of the unemployed who prevent them from obtaining employment and even encourage them to remain unemployed.

⁴ I use the term welfare regimes and not welfare state on purpose, since the former implies the existence of a plurality of actors, and different balances among them, through which individual and household welfare and protection may be achieved. I think that this focus on interrelationship and changing balance between different actors and agencies is the main contribution of Esping Andersen's seminal work (1990), which stands even after the many criticisms addressed to it. And Esping Andersen himself in his most recent work (1999) acknowledging some of these critiques, has further developed the crucial role of the family and of its gender relations both in the solutions offered and in the problems posed by the different regimes.

⁵ I rely here partly on an article I wrote with Mary Daly, forthcoming

⁶ According to Kuhn a paradigm is "a constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn 1970, p.175)

⁷ See Levitas (1998) for an alternative set of discourses on social exclusion. In the context of the British case, she identifies the following three discourses: a redistributionist discourse the prime concern of which is poverty; a moral underclass discourse which centres on moral and behavioral inadequacies of excluded people; and a social integrationist discourse which focuses on paid work..

⁸ Although the term social exclusion gained popularity first and foremost in France, from where it was "imported" in other countries and languages to which it was formerly extraneous (see e.g. Frétiugué 1999), even in France it gained popularity only in the mid-Eighties, as an outcome of the concern for growing unemployment, precarization

of jobs, and the emergence of so called new poverty. Previously the term, first introduced by Lenoir (1974), was strongly contested on political grounds and in any case applied only to groups and phenomena perceived as marginal (see Paugam 1996, pp. 8-16, Frétiugué 1999, chap.3)

⁹ It is interesting that in France, where both the notion of social exclusion and its policy counterpart ‘insertion’ were first and most thoroughly developed, the latter remains a very contested and indefinite term and practice, as many observers keep pointing out. See Belorgey (1996) and Barbier (1998).

¹⁰ Although this was first developed in Germany by Glotz (1984)

¹¹ The phenomenon of the working poor is a specific paradox within the liberal paradigm, since those in paid work by definition are performing their duty but are none the better off for it. They represent the recurrent problem of the ‘deserving poor’. It is possibly no accident that it is within this paradigm – starting with OECD economists – that proposals and practices for subsidising low paid/low skilled jobs are most developed, often as an alternative to minimum income provisions.

¹² Leisering and Leibfried (1999) suggest that the concept of risk society developed by Beck (1992) is a better basis for social policies which prevent poverty and social exclusion in contemporary societies than those of the underclass or the two-thirds society.

¹³ These data are confirmed also by another Targeted Socio.Economic Reserach study, based on a sample of 50 qualitative interviews to unemployed youth in each of six European Countries: the “Youth unemployment and social exclusion (YUSEDER) project. See Kieselbach T., Beelman G., Titzel A. and Traiser U., Long-term Unemployed Youth: A Qualitative Study on Risk of Social Exclusion in Six European Coutries. Report to DGXII.

¹⁴ Recent longitudinal research has challenged simplistic views concerning the generation of welfare dependency. Studies on welfare recipients in the UK and Germany, for instance, have offered no evidence of large numbers of people adopting social assistance as a permanent way of life. People become long term recipient because they have personal and biographical characteristics which render them more vulnerable in the labor market, although these characteristics may be partially different in the various national contexts: e.g. mostly lone motherhood in the UK, long term male unemployment in Germany. At the same time, receiving social assistance may be instrumental in a wider middle term strategy towards strengthening one’s own resources and capabilities and/or re-orienting one’s own life. (Walker and Shaw 1998, Leisering and Leibfried 1999, Leisering and Walker, 1998).

¹⁵ The socially assisted may be taken as being fairly representative of the poor only in so far social assistance is universal. This is not always the case, not even in Europe. Thus the degree to which these and other types are present is largely dependent on the degree of universality, and of generosity, of a given social assistance system. This issue has been the focus of a comparative study funded by the EU under the TSER program, coordinated by this author (Saraceno forthcoming)

¹⁶ Debating on the new interest for and acknowledgement of “differences” Taylor (1998) points to a similar risk. He claims that in contemporary social policy the bases upon which interest are attributed to particular groups identified as communities are

linked to boundary maintenance between the positively evaluated universal self and the negated particular ‘other’, or between the included, integrated citizen and the excluded alien.

¹⁷ For instance there is a wide criticism of Europanel data on income and poverty, particularly from the point of view of representativity since the national samples are small and the poor within them even smaller.

¹⁸ Berman and Phillips point out that their list of indicators for all four dimensions greatly overlaps with the list of the OECD indicators, except for the povwerment/disempowerment dimension.

¹⁹ According to these authors there are basic human needs, comprising physical health and human autonomy. To meet these needs a number of intermediate needs are identified. They include: adequate nutrition, housing, non hazardous work and physical environment, healthcare, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical and economic security, safe birth-control and child-bearing, basic education.